

MONTGOMERY (D.W.)

ADDRESS

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By D. W. MONTGOMERY, M. D.

My Confreres and Consæurs:

The meetings of the year now closing have been pleasant and harmonious, the papers interesting and the discussions spirited. Here and there we have had, perhaps, a dissatisfied member; one takes umbrage at the idea that he is not allowed sufficiently to impress his views; then because there are women in the fraternity we lose a valued member; a third simply says we do not come up to his ideal of what such a society should be; another has a grievance as old as the hills, the fee-bill is not sufficiently high for him and he presents us with a knock-down argument for its augmentation by leaving us and ceasing to pay fees to us.

Now, how are we going to satisfy our histrionic friend, the misogynist, the idealist and the megalomaniac? How does it happen that a man feels such confidence in his own judgment that he is willing to dominate all his fellows? As we are the largest county medical society on the Pacific Coast suppose they please us. At any rate the most generous way of trying to alter something clashing with one's own views is to present the case as forcibly as possible to the Society and then abide by the issue.

The complaint of the member discontented with the fee-bill ran, that we showed marked favoritism to surgeons. 'Tis a matter deeply to be regretted that the services of a physician can never, from the nature of things, be so well paid as those of a surgeon. The services of a physician are less obvious, less ostentatious, less full of dramatic effect, and the world has been willing in all ages and in all countries to pay for dramatic effect. Furthermore, a surgeon can say "It is necessary to perform an operation to cure you. The operation requires skill and experience, and it will cost so and so much." And he can



add that "people being always more willing to pay for what they expect than for what they have had, you will please pay the fee before the operation is performed." A physician is unable to do this.

It may be urged that as this fee-bill is largely for use in the courts for the guidance of lawyers and judges, educated gentlemen, and presumably appreciative of the value of professional services, that the schedule ought to be raised to a degree more becoming the knowledge required in order that the legal profession may allow fees to doctors in some measure consonant with the valuation they place on their own work. But, unfortunately for us, they do not take this view of the situation. A lawyer naturally tries to get all he can for his services, and a judge is usually inclined to allow a lawyer's demand, for, as Bryce says: ¹ "The judge who has recently quitted the ranks of the bar remains in sympathy with it, respects its views and desires its approbation." A physician, seeing his legal friend's success, makes a request before a tribunal for a comparatively modest fee, only to see it cut down.

It is all nonsense to say, as many lawyers do, that it requires a peculiar kind of talent, the legal mind, to be a lawyer, and that its rarity is the sole reason they receive, and justly, such enormous fees. All pre-eminent mental work is the result of aptitude in a particular direction, and if legal talent is the best paid it is because of some of the following reasons: they often make their bargains before commencing suit; having won, they often have the money in their hands and can attach their portion of it; and, best of all, the judge, whose word is practically final, and who is the only uncontrolled power in the commonwealth, is a lawyer, who, with our elective judiciary, may shortly be practicing himself. We ourselves know that the successful physician must have much the same type of mind as the successful jurist, although developed on somewhat different lines; he must have the same industry in looking up data, and in recognizing, appreciating and sifting out a fact. The lawyer's reflective faculties and the power of putting his thoughts clearly and concisely into speech or writing are usually better developed than with us, but, on the other hand, the physician's powers of observation are sharpened to the extreme. It often happens that a doctor, who it may be has an Apachelike power of observ-

¹ The American Commonwealth, by James Bryce, Vol. 1, page 259.]

ing and tracing symptoms, when asked to tell or write his experience makes a complete failure of it. He will regale you with the dry bones of what he has read, and often the bones are very dry. Take the same man at the bedside or get him heated in discussion and you will strike the true fire out of him. It is here where the value of the discussions in medical societies is most apparent, in training the medical man to speak of what he has seen and done.

But brighter and brighter days are coming to us. We can see them in that most beautiful of all the mirrors of public opinion, in the writings of great authors. Molière, Rabelais, and Le Sage hold up doctors to scorn as ignorant charlatans or pedants, while Emile Zola gives us, in his last novel, *La Débâcle*, the helpful, humane and intelligently patriotic doctors Bourroche and Dalichamp. And we may rest assured that in spite of a prejudiced judiciary and a press which, from business motives, is unfavorable to us on every possible occasion, we will soon reach here in America the position the profession has already attained on the Continent. And when we have won that position the fees will take care of themselves.

At one of our meetings it was the painful duty of the Society to punish some of its members for defection from the line of good taste in the matter of making themselves known to the community. Dr. J. C. Sundberg, now on the point of leaving our city to go to that of the Caliphs to act as American Consul, adding to his official duties the hunting of winged bulls for several learned societies, and so becoming from time to time a sort of antiquarian cowboy, was the fearless and astute unearther of many abuses among us, particularly that most disgusting abuse, newspaper notoriety. The exposure of that asinine absurdity (newspaper advertising by physicians) required a ready pen and much pluck. It brought him no money, however, only the respect of those who appreciated his unselfish efforts to better our morals and manners. The like success in bringing to light an ancient taurine absurdity on the Mesopotamian plains will bring him both fame and monetary reward. Our wish is that good fortune may attend him.

When will a certain class of medical men learn that at any rate the miserable biographical sketch with photograph kind of advertising is directly detrimental to them; that they put themselves in the position of George Eliot's turkey-cock, having a

desire for admiration but not knowing well what is admirable; that they make themselves ridiculous with the recital of the little gossip details of when they were born, their precocious childhood, whom they married, etc.; that these exhibitions of a picayune mind can only have one result, a loss of esteem both by the public and the profession, and a consequent and inevitable loss in fees as well.

Rept. from.

Pacific M. J. -

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